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ABSTRACT

A community college is committed to serve all persons living in the areas it encompasses, and it must demonstrate this committment. At Sauk Valley College in Dixon, Illinois, language instruction must extend beyond the traditional Spanish-for-anglos classes, because there is a large population of Mexican-Americans living within the school district. This paper enumerates methods used at Sauk to aid both anglo and Mexican-American students. Those methods include a Bilingual Teacher Aide Certificate program, special Spanish courses for nurses and law enforcement personnel, and a trade-of-languages-program in a nearby ESL school. Efforts are also made to assist local high school and church Chicano youth groups. The two-way street of language instruction in the community college encourages the traditional course of study in Spanish for anglo students. It also encourages them to use their language skills to work toward meaningful, career-oriented goals. It encourages Mexican-Americans to take advantage of their unique bilingual qualifications in school aide work. (Author)

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION--A TWO-WAY STREET FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By

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of Spanish and Portuguese in
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One community college in north central Illinois is facing the problem of bilinguality with a unique "two languages for everyone" approach. For the traditionalist in language study, Sauk Valley College in Dixon, Illinois offers the standard, transfer-oriented college fare: elementary and intermediate level courses in Spanish. But even here the traditional gives way to something special. We have a Chicano minority population at Sauk--we must do something special for these people. Too frequently on college campuses, the Chicano must fall among those labeled by Jose Barron as the "forgotten men and women in our country."[1]

The particular focus of our concern at Sauk has re-aimed and acquired a second direction: there was a traditional course of study to be pursued, but our concern was also to enable the Chicano student to emerge from the "forgotten men and women" class.

Sauk is trying to incorporate innovative teaching in its traditional courses, but its concern must also be centered on a population which demands more attention to the native speaker of Spanish. In one nearby community--Sterling, Illinois--statistics show that about 16% of the population is Mexican-American. A large steel mill attracts these workers and the employees and employer have settled down to a mutually satisfactory arrangement, now entering its third generation of workers in some families. If 3,000 Mexican-Americans live but seven miles from Sauk Valley College, and if the college is to serve the community college ideology of offering all members of its communities an equal opportunity for education, steps must be taken to extend our educational facilities to these persons whose native tongue is not English.

To accomplish this end of adequate education for all, Sauk has devised several special instructional programs working from the neutral midpoint of no language. In one direction, attention is focused on the student (adult, teenager and child) who operates as the Mexican-American has been forced to operate in this country: at home he speaks "family Spanish"; at school he speaks, with difficulty, passable English. He may be fresh from the border; his United States background has diluted his Spanish facility; his family ties and use of Spanish at home have "Chicano-ized" his English. He is literally caught between two languages, unless he is newly arrived from Mexico, at which point his non-existent English gives him trouble. In the other direction, a concerned community college must attend to the monolingual English-speaker whose profession brings him into daily contact with the Spanish-speaking. Sauk's concern flayed foolishly in all directions at first.

Not knowing how best to undo the language jumble and harm done in such a community, I decided we should start with a child whose linguistic patterns were still relatively unjumbled. He used Spanish at home, with relatives, at play. His shock of entry into an anglo school, where lessons in English only would keep him apart, had not yet occurred. What could the community college accomplish to reach out in one of its communities and aid the Spanish-speaking child in an English-speaking school? When we started our investigation into this frustrating -- at times tragic -- picture of lack of understanding, we were well in advance of the Mandatory Bilingual Education Act. In the classrooms no teachers spoke Spanish. Few of the classrooms had aides, let alone bilingual ones. All the hardships that current Bilingual/Bicultural programs are attempting to remedy were evident in the classrooms where

the child who knew little or no English was placed.

The focus of the attention of public schools has long been myopic. Jeffrey Kobrick, in his 1972 article arguing the "compelling case for Bilingual Education" had this to say: "Like most teachers of non-English speaking children, the teacher did not know the child's language. Yet she treated a six-year-old as dense for the crime of not knowing hers."[2] The argument is that the student is to be reoriented, remodeled, retooled if he is to succeed in school, hence messages are sent home insisting that the parents speak English in the home. If the student reaches high school level, he is taught "anglo-textbook-Spanish." He balks at the grammar, he receives a D in his native language and he still hasn't made the grade as a good speaker of "anglo." Usually he drops out of school.

Somewhere both the needs of the anglo school teachers and administrators, and those of the Chicano student must be met. Here is a cry for understanding that the community college is equipped to answer. Several years ago Sauk responded. And the first answer devised by Sauk was to these very young students of the community.

A program for Bilingual Teacher Aides was introduced in 1972 and a grant was applied for and received from the Illinois Junior College Board to make the implementation of the Aide program possible. The following quotation is from the program description:

> The proposed program is designed to train Bilingual Teachers Aides. It is a part of the Sauk Valley College Human Service Program. For the Sauk Valley College student it will provide a certificate testifying to his capacities to serve as a bilingual teachers aide.
>
> The program, while terminal in nature, could be coupled with an Associate in Arts degree, leading to a baccalaureate transfer program.
>
> A core curriculum, common to all aide programs, consisting of English grammar and composition, child growth and development, health and first aid, would be supplemented by specific

> offerings in bilingual instruction. The Spanish courses at Sauk include an Introduction to Mexican-American Studies. Elective courses in sociology, psychology, history and Spanish are also available and recommended.
>
> The need for bilingual teacher aides is acute in the Sterling area. The Bilingual Aide program can be offered and implemented in the established Teacher Aide curriculum.[3]

While the fledgling Bilingual Aide was beginning her studies and practicum, the grant for a Bilingual/Bicultural program at Wallace Elementary School in Sterling was awarded.

In the ensuing four years, we have watched great development in children and aides alike. Our Bilingual Aides have acquired a new measure of self-esteem. Their contribution to the well-being of their charges in the lower grades cannot be measured. A program articulating the importance of bilingual aides in New Mexico offers these observations:

> For most of the children in the classroom this is the first time they have been away from home. The adjustment from home life to school is not an easy one, and the children will probably look to you (the Aide) for much assistance. In fact you may become quite like their own mother or father. They will probably tell you many things about their home and school life. If you speak their native language, they may feel more comfortable when telling you things in their native language rather than in English.[4]

Our Bilingual Aide program at Sauk has aided a peculiarly gifted person to find her own niche in our society without the expensive requirement of years of university training. We are aware of our immediate needs for the provision of aides in the classroom who can understand what both teacher and pupil are saying. We have helped the Mexican-American woman, long suffering silently from meandering or ill-defined career hopes, to gain stature in her own sight as an especially talented person -- a bilingual. "La Raza" becomes a specific cause for pride if attainable career goals are available.

The aides love their four and five year old charges. They speak their language and teach them a new one. More than being bilingual,

they are bicultural. They cannot be categorized as deficient teachers, although they are still learning some of the rudimentaries of the teaching profession. They are strong in the games they can play with the children, the songs they will sing, the culture they will pass on. Visit a piñata party they have planned. ! Qué alegría!

With the Teacher Aide grant in hand, much more became possible: aiding a limping high school latino club, strengthening rapport with area high school teachers, pulling together all the material necessary for a Chicano Studies course. Grant money helped Sauk sponsor a Latino Day at the college for all area Spanish-American high school students, providing them with speakers from Illinois and neighboring states, a Chicano Theater group and some very good Mexican mole for 250 students. We have built an excellent library of Chicano novels, plays and poetry. We now alternate Chicano Culture (a Sociology course) with Chicano Literature for an offering each semester. We are usually welcome at tu CASA -- a center for Latinos in Sterling. It is a long process; we hope the Mexican-American population is learning that we in the college are repeating, "nuestra casa, Sauk Valley College, es su casa" in all sincerity.

It is time to travel in the other direction on the two-way-street. What of the obsessively monolingual "gringo" who knows no Spanish nor gives any indication of wanting to know any? What of the nurse whose patient cringes in fear, whose needs cannot be attended to because she has voiced them in the only language she knows -- Spanish, and the nurse knows only English? And what of the law enforcement officer who meets the driver with the "carro discompuesto" and arrests, misunderstandings and frequently days and nights in jail result from the communication breakdown?

The citizens whose only language is English have wakened to the crippling effects their monolingualism may have in relating to a public where Sparish is the lingua franca. Through their concern, and at their insistence, Sauk returned to the no-language point with these people. The Spanish instruction they receive in "Career Spanish" courses is practical, related to their field of work, and relevant. The bilingual street at Sauk must make clear the options open to anglo students. They can learn some life-saving Spanish.

For those who desire, we have transferred the required language laboratory hour in the Intermediate Spanish course to actual "living lab" conditions in the English Language School in Sterling, Illinois. There, non-speakers of English are given lessons in English (or, at least, the Sauk student hears their lessons in English as a Second Language.) In exchange, the Sauk student receives an hour's practice with a native speaker of Spanish. The fluency in Spanish of the gringo increases remarkably; the friendships he establishes are warm; real cross-cultural understanding is initiated. In a few, special cases this understanding has grown to the extent that our anglo student has enrolled in university programs abroad, living with families in Mexico. In this country he has moved into the Casa Latina with University students whose first language is Spanish and has assimilated into his working vocabulary many of the chicano-isms of his house-mates. From this he is able to build a bridge to a realistic exposure to a Bilingual/Bicultural Program of Studies. In the case of these exceptional students, our two-way street has worked beautifully!

Our English-speaking student who may transfer to a University has followed a marker that the community college has made available. He

can see a relevant goal: comprehension of Spanish in the "real world." Other real world experiences for our anglo students involve "action for anglos." They will attempt to integrate some working Spanish into their learning experiences as nurses or law enforcement personnel.

For our nurses we point out that there are patients in the hospital who suffer in silence because no nurse understands the Spanish of his complaints or fears. The patient is terrified by the injections, or the prospect of them; he panics in a world where basic physical discomforts cannot be explained, hence alleviated; he suffers, but without dignity. We have tried to put together a crash course, cassette tapes and a minimal goal of at least teaching the nurses how to ask, "dónde le duele?" We have found good Spanish for Nurses' texts; we have been fortunate to have nearby a bilingual nurse/teacher to put the basics on tape. Nurses and their shift schedules are our greatest problem right now. The hours to instruct the nurses are almost impossible to arrange.

We know that many Chicanos are arrested, interrogated (?) and jailed because frequently no law enforcement officer can understand the two sides to the infraction that brought the Spanish-speaking suspect to a grim world "donde él no tiene ciertos derechos." How can he be read his rights when he is not considered innocent? He has been proven guilty. Beyond a reasonable doubt, he doesn't speak English. This is, in all honesty, one of the paths that make up our two-way street that still needs markers. We can find a bilingual law enforcement officer but that does not mean that he is, necessarily, a good teacher. Here we must evaluate what we are doing -- and what we should be doing as a good community college, and attempt to mirror what has been done in urban colleges faced with the same need for policemen who know a little Spanish.

The program of "Spanish for Careers" has not been in operation long enough at Sauk to tabulate results. The ideal, from a pedagogical or idealogical point of view needs attention. It is only in the close confines of a community that pays more than lip service to the admonishment that a community college is to serve all members of its community that the ideal may hope to be attained. With our live laboratory in operation at Sauk, we await a bilingual revolution and we travel a two-way street in its pursuit.

REFERENCES

[1]Barron, Jose, "Chicanos in the Community College," Junior College Journal, June/July 1972.

[2]Kobrick, Jeffrey, "The Compelling Case for Bilingual Education," Saturday Review, April 29, 1972.

[3]Proposal prepared by Mrs. Kathryn Lillyman extending the information contained on the "Application for Approval of a Public Service Grant for Junior Colleges."

[4]Gordon, Sandra, and Donna Teck, Teacher/Teacher Aide Companion Training Manual (Southwestern Cooperative Education Laboratory Inc., Albuquerque, N.M., 1971) p. 22.